

EUROPEAN
TRASH
CINEMA



9/10

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DEATH LAID AN EGG aka PLUCKED (1967)

DIRECTOR:Giulio Questi
SCREENPLAY:Giulio Questi & Franco Arcalli
PRODUCER:Franco Berras
MUSIC:Bruno Nardone
EDITOR:Franco Arcalli
CAST:Gina Lollobrigide (Anna)
Jean Louis Trintignant (Marco)
Eve Aulin (Sahri)
Jean Schleski (Mondaini)
Renato Romano (Luigi)

Why a forum on a film 99% of my readers have never seen? **DEATH LAID AN EGG** is a touchstone in the mutation of my film interest. Much like a tumor, the film has festered in my brain since 1972, slowly overtaking my neurons and synapses until around 1984, when I finally gave up on the U.S. film industry altogether. I honestly never expected to see it again(since I've met Tom Weisser and visited Miami video stores, where I found an english language copy of **DEATH LAID AN EGG**, I've stricken this thought from my mind forever!), but after reseeing it, I'm convinced **ETC** was conceived for this very moment.

In 1972 I was a college sophomore at Texas A&M University (home of Aggie jokes and rednecks), taking courses in Wildlife Science(if you want to spend 4 useless years getting a worthless degree, I highly recommend you enroll in such a field). Every saturday night, for want of something to do, 4 or 8 of us from the dorm would go to see the Midnight movie playing at the local theatre. **PLUCKED** (as it was named during it's 1972 release) sounded so stupid that we had to give it a try. Within 15 minutes we were speechless. Within 30 minutes we were the only ones left in the theatre! it was my first encounter with Eve Aulin and I became a fan on the spot. I wanted to crazy give my private parts to Gina Lollobrigide. It was at this point I realized that director Giulio Questi was an alien lifeform. After that night I began slowly shifting my viewing habits toward the Italian/spanish spectrum. Rather than go see **NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD** for the tenth time, I'd stay home and watch **ASSIGNMENT TERROR** on TV. Hell, I even sat thru a Spanish language showing of Meschy's **LA VENGANZA DE MORIA** (and this was 1973). Years passed and unfortunately Euro-trash releases slowed to a trickle at the local movie houses and so I drifted away from it. However thanks to video [**REDNOTE TIME: TO ALL YOU FINKER AND MOANER TYPES WHO RANT AND RAVE ABOUT THE EVILS OF VIDEO--GO FORNIFICATE YOURSELVES!!** WITHOUT VIDEO 99% OF ALL THE GREAT EURO-SHIT I'VE

VIEWED SINCE SI WOULD HAVE BEEN AN IMPOSSIBILITY], this is no longer the case.

So, why a forum? Well, this is a risky dink fansine afterall, and if so editor can't do whatever suits his fancy, why bother. I sent out copies of DEATH LAID AN EGG to a variety of folks; people with an extensive background in NYC (ie Tim Lucas, Stephen Bisette and Michael Secula) to folks who, while not exactly virgins on the subject, aren't died in the wool fanatics (Jeff Smith and Cecil Doyle) and asked for their opinions. I beg your indulgence for just this one issue, NYC will be a better place for it, I promise.

DEATH LAID AN Egg

FORUM



JS.

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Cecil Doyle is the editor of fandom's most eclectic newsletter, EGG-NOMAN. I thought it would be fun to blow Cecil's shorts off by sending him DEATH LAID AN EGG and asking for his comments.

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A challenging European arthouse trash curio that defies accurate description. Initial viewing felt not unlike my "first time" with Kubrick's 2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY (1968) at the tender age of fourteen. In other words, I loved what I had experienced but could in no way properly decipher what it all really meant. DEATH LAID AN EGG fries the senses sunnyside-up while managing to work as a seething indictment on the overall selfishness of the Corporate Machine. A film about manipulation (and deceit and morality and death and poultry and Gina Lollobrigida in colorful underwear) with nervously effective direction from Giulio Questi and Bruno Maderna's full-blown, avant garde musical score astounding (if not disorienting) the viewer for its duration. Death metaphors abound in the story of a poultry farm and "the new machinery" that changes the existence of everyone connected with it. Bizarre beyond belief! Cluck! Cluck!

Jeff Smith designed this issue's logo and of course I had to get his opinions of the film. Poor Jeff has known me for some time and has witnessed my complete silliness to Euro-trash. He doesn't always understand it, but bless him he puts up with. Thanks Jeff.

===== Ah, if only I had a month or two to study and draw some elaborate metaphors from the convoluted tapestry of DEATH LAID AN EGG, a film that defies both categorization and traditional critical analysis. A film that is just linear enough to avoid being read as wholly allegorical, and at the same time seems to revel in oblique symbolism without representation. In short: DEATH LAID AN EGG is a film that is crammed with subtexts, but I'll be hanged if I can figure out what they are.

Or maybe this is just weirdness of the first degree. Superimposed on a rather standard issue '70s tale of infidelity and murder is an overriding and relentless visual motif: chickens. Yes, chickens, perhaps the most unthreatening and unfrightening animals on the face of the earth... and yet they are everywhere in this film: cross-sections of chickens, their circulatory systems and bone structure line the walls; an ad man shows posters of chickens as the average consumer, dressed in human clothes. The protagonist (Jean Louis Trintignant) not only works at a company that distributes chicken related products (a memorable surreal image shows the corridors of the corporation lined with huge wall-sized photo blowups of chickens) but also has a private chicken-breeding farm at home, where he employs a scientist who has discovered a way to breed headless and wingless chickens-- "Just look at it! It's all meat and the bones are small!" the scientist proclaims. The headless prototypes are bizarre, almost ERASENHEAD-ish aberrations, which pulse and quiver, though they have no mouth to breathe through, at least until Trintignant beashes them into a pulpy mush in a fit of hysterical xenophobia.

Director Questi must get the bulk of the credit for the film's demented vision: the weirdness extends far beyond the chicken-fetish photography-- it seeps into every nook and cranny of the film. It has been shot and edited in a manner that can't exactly be called ersey fersey, but does tend to make the viewer occasionally doubt the sanity of the technicians involved. Rapid tracking shots often seem to glide right past their intended subject matter, and frame composition is anything but ordinary; the cutting is often hyperbolic and confusing, as in the opening sequence, a murder committed in a hotel; Questi intercuts the murder with several other wholly superfluous characters in different hotel rooms, in I suppose, some hysteric attempt to contrast the violence with the mundanity of every day life. Augmenting these erratic images is a musical score that simply must be heard to be believed, a frantic hodgepodge of disparate instruments (and principally a tinkly piano) running through various unmelodic trills and sonic runs.

Went more? Trintignant is married to the goddess-like Gina Lollobrigida (whose refusal to do nude scenes is sidestepped with

arty light-and-shadow shots and that old "let's smear vaseline over the lens so her nipples won't show" gag), and yet, for some reason, he prefers her flaccid blonde assistant (Ewa Aulin), who eventually double-crosses him by telling Gina that Jean Louis has been seeing hookers at the local hotel. So Gina has the brilliant idea that she and Aulin will dress as whores and surprise him at the hotel. Several long sequences are eaten up as Gina and Ewa shop for their "hooker" outfits, and yet all this excessive buildup is thrown out with an offscreen climax that is usually explained later.

To be blunt, DEATH LAID AN EGG doesn't work as a thriller--the story is far too leisurely, and you never care enough about the characters to give a hoot who lives or dies: "traditional" plot devices like foreshadowing and payoff are treated in such a perfunctory manner as to be virtually meaningless--in one scene a dog falls into the grinding gears of a machine, but the moment is played in such a non-sequiter way that we don't even see it as precursor to Trintignant's proposed revenge against his traitorous mistress. But by the very nature of its unconventional storytelling, DEATH LAID AN EGG emerges as one of the most hilariously fascinating form-over-content films ever made. One cannot help but be entranced (and occasionally infuriated) at the aggressive ODDNESS of the thing--if there is another film like it in the cinema world, I'd like to see it.

Next up is Michael Secula's brief but perceptive comments. Michael chastised me for lumping a Paul Naschy film under the term ITALIANESQUE. So in the spirit of Euro-coproductioes I'll now use the term "Italian-Spanish-French-esque".

This straight-faced spoof of overly complicated psychological thrillers really performs an incredible feat, in that it somehow manages to avoid betraying itself as a put-on until the bitter end. Remarkable, considering the utter preposterousness of the storyline we are expected to--and do--swallow. And therein lies its ultimate success: for the film is like listening to someone relate an amazing experience of theirs, so captivating that you never pause to question their veracity...only to find out there's a punchline waiting at the end and the joke's on you! It takes a clever storyteller to make gullible fools out of normally intelligent people (and the director Giulio Questi proves to be a masterful and daring one at that); but as with any good joke, the only folks who won't find this to be an enjoyable diversion are the REAL dummies who walk away muttering "I don't get it".

PLUG TIME--Steve Fuchsalski is back with SHOCK CINEMA. The first issue runs 26 pages and is jammed packed with reviews similar to Steve's last zine, SLIMETIME. Send Steve \$3 for the first issue at 1108 East Genesee St., #103, Syracuse, NY 13210.

David Walker is up next with his usual erudite perceptions. David unfortunately doesn't have much time these days for writing, so I'm especially glad he could contribute to this forum.

With Michelle Pfeiffer eyes and a mouth Michael Weldon has called "pouty," to name just a couple of attributes, Eva Aulin is my choice as the greatest supernal--and carnal--beauty of the late '60s/early '70s European Co-production. I haven't seen her best-known film, 1968's *CANDY*, but the three pictures of hers that I have seen are, by coincidence, three of the most dis-junctively and frenetically edited products of that style-happy period in my viewing experience. Maybe Eva's distracting presence on the set had something to do with it. Joe D'Amato's most lyrical horror film, *DEATH SMILES ON A MURDERER* (1973), which stars Eva at her most otherworldly and radiant, is harmed by a highly fragmented approach to storytelling and editing. 1972's *LEGEND OF BLOOD CASTLE*, which features Eva alongside elder beauty Lucie Arnaz, is probably Jorge MANCHESTER MORGUE Grau's best movie, but with its jugged, oblique style obfuscating the storyline, it's hard to say for sure. (The fact that U.S. prints are short of fifteen minutes suggests that Grau deserves little blame.) And 1967's *DEATH LAID AN EGG*, full to the brim with distinctive oddball elements, can offer as its most distinctively oddball trait its deliberately non-utilitarian, staccato editing style. The first time I watched the opening sequence, with its confusing cross-cutting between various occupants of the "Highway Motel" and shots of traffic zooming on the contiguous criss-crossing freeways, I found it irritatingly blurry and discontinuous. However, after watching the entire movie and getting "in tune" with its rhythms, I did find myself halfway appreciating the sequence, upon a second viewing, for its experiments with editing form. The closely-clipped diagonal pans, leading from, say, the bottom of a wall to an unidentified figure's shoulder, i.e. from nowhere in particular, and included simply for purposes of rhythm or possibly to rhyme with the intercut shots of cars crossing the screen, are of course pretentious as hell--and the director, Giulio Questi, isn't quite in Nicholas Roeg's league--but this overly-energetic cutting style, sustained as it is throughout the picture, does indeed "work" at times. A flash-back of the flaming aftermath of a car wreck, depicted via hyper-kinetic intercutting of smoking metal heap and highway white lines shooting down the frame like photon torpedoes, succeeds admirably in getting the right sensation across. Similarly, scenes of Jean Louis Trintignant meandering through a tall field with lover Aulin achieve a nicely tactile sensuousness thanks to the densely detailed editing. But just as often, the editing succeeds only in blocking interest.

If the editing approach is the film's most pervasive and distinctive oddball trait, there are plenty of other salient ingredients that are, to say the least, passing strange. Take, for instance, the way the former employees of Jean Louis Trintignant's fully-automated chicken farm gather outside the operation's gates to stare ominously at Trintignant, his wife (Gina Lollobrigida), and a visiting relation (Aulin); its offhand presentation is what makes this element surreal. Of course, the selection of a poultry farm as the film's setting is slightly off the wall so

its own right, and all the straight-faced bits of business involving the idea of chickens get progressively more queer, as scenes of Tristram piping bossa nova music into the grand, hi-tech chicken roost give way to scenes of a publicity campaign designed to promote the chicken as an integral part of society or as "the common man." The film's height of weirdness, though, is reached when the chicken operation's resident chemist succeeds in creating, through experiments with radioactivity, headless and wingless mutant chickens, the development of which, according to Gise Lollobrigida, will give her and Tristram something "mysterious" to share together. The movie's satisfying ending carries two or three wholly bizarre stingers-in-the-tail, the success of which is probably made possible by the aforementioned oblique editing style. (We're too disoriented to figure it all out ahead of time.) Mention should be made of Bruno Maderna's dissonant string-and-percussion music score: it's alternately irritating and impressively avant-garde, just like the editing. DEATH LAYS AN EGG is as qui generis as anything you're likely to see.

La morte ha fatto l'uovo (Death Lays An Egg)

1967



The New York Times

Packed

A Cautious Way to Love—La Morta Lattina

L'Espresso
 Hmmm, Yes! A Chicken Farmer husband sets a nasty trap for his wife, with the aid of his mistress, who with her lover sets a trap for both of them! And so, who is it that ends up in tiny pieces as chickens feed? That's the problem the police have to face up to! Glamorous people taking part in this nasty business include Gina Lollobrigida, Jean-Louis Trintignant, Eva Aulin and Renato Russo. Rest of cast: Giulio Donato, Clelio Del Col, Ugo Adinolfi, Aldo Bonamano, Lina Ferraro, Margherita Horowitz, Giuliano Raffaelli, Gian Carlo Sisti, Jean Sorelli, Vittorio Andre, Giorgio Polyrus, Maria Milles, Conrad Anderson, Nina de Filippo, Maria Giannardi, Barbara Pissone, Jean Rouques, Lucien Trépo, Dir: Giulio Guerci. (Bancor's.) *Well Flooting.* (R) 101 Min. Crr. A.



The next review is by long-time friend and correspondent, Conrad Widner.

Here is a soaked-out Italian mess that brings to mind the old adage "must be seen to be believed."

Marco (Jean-Louis Trintignant) and his mistress, Gabrielle (Eva Aulin of CANDY and DEATH SMILES ON A MURDERER fame) plan to kill Marco's wife (Gina Lollobrigida). That's the basic plot of the story. Sounds like another routine let's-knock-off-the-wife-to-get-her-mucho-bucks-film, right? Believe me, this is not your conventional thriller in terms of the way it is presented. Characters engage in conversations so pointless to the plot that it boggles the mind. Cast members sprout choice lines such as "I thought this was the room of truth" or something like that. Weird subplots involve Marco's habit of killing women (or so it seems) and his study of chickens for the betterment of mankind! Photography by Carlo Di Palma gives us many close-ups of our brave thespians' faces (and other body parts), but little of the trademark fine Italian camera work. Bruno Maderna's score sounds like a lounge act warming up after 400 beers. As for the acting, well Eva Aulin changes her facial expressions a few times and that's about it. Jean-Louis Trintignant and Gina Lollobrigida both look as though they would rather be anywhere else than in this film. After "FINE" flashed on screen I scratched my head and wondered just what the heck I had watched. Was director, Quastel, trying to do a parody of art films or was he stoned out of his mind when he made this? Whatever the case, it's meaningless madness that I had fun watching. I may never be the same again. Yes, DEATH LAID AN EGG and cinema hatched a turkey.

if not for my next reviewer, this issue would never have become a reality. Tom Waisner has become an indispensable behind the scenes motivating factor for this newsletter. As I said in the introduction, Tom's tour of Miami turned up this film in the first place. Plus, he has been feeding me a continuous supply of Euro-videos ever since. Tom takes a much different approach with his "review", but it certainly fits in well with all the others.

I was there. Yes, I was there when Craig Ledbetter, your STC editor, and this film, Death Laid An Egg, came face to face. Not the first time. But rather, for the re-union. The second time. The second coming, so to speak.

Here's how it all happened. For months, I had been telling Craig about the incredible amount of films that were available here, in Miami Florida; movies which, seemingly, were not available anywhere else in the USA. "It probably has to do with the large number of Hispanics living here," I had told him, "there's lots of films on the shelves at certain ethnic video stores, imported from South America. Plenty of foreign films. Most of them in English, with Spanish subtitles. It's a real treasure chest."

"Yeah, sure," Craig had said. But after we started trading a bit, he became a believer. And so Craig decided to visit me for a video exploring weekend. Now this is where the story gets good. Okay? Okay.

After I picked him up at the airport, he mentioned to me that he hoped to find some Jean Franco stuff ("Yeah, sure. Oh, boy. Can't wait," I thought to myself; You see, I'm not a big fan of Mr. Franco. Sorry, Tim). But Craig also said he was looking for a bizarre little thriller called Juana With A Tongue Of Fire, and then he told me about another film on his all time "want list:" Plucked.

Craig admitted to me that this movie, Plucked, had changed his life (!!!). He claimed that this film, single-handedly, turned him into the Euro-Tech fanatic he is today. (Incredible, huh?) It seems that Craig and some of his college buddies had gone to see this gem at a midnight showing, fifteen years ago. He was so warped by the cinematic experience that he has not been the same since.

No more predictable American-made puff for Craig Ledbetter. The pap being shown at the local 10 Screen Cinema Cement Palace could not hold his interest any longer. No. No. No.

Well, if we believe Craig (and why shouldn't we? Don't we all have such a movie hidden somewhere in our past?) fifteen years ago he stumbled into a theater and he saw Plucked. And his world changed. Today, Craig is the editor of this very magazine. He is a scholar, specializing in the universes of Fleury European Films. He is respected by elite, the gentry, the aristocracy of the cult film world. All because of this movie. All as a direct result of seeing this film, fifteen years ago.

(Now this is the sad part,) he confessed to me that he hadn't been able to see the movie since!!!!!! This epic of a film is not available on U.S. pre-record! It's unbelievable, but it's true.

However, on the bottom shelf (well, not really the bottom shelf; it was actually the third from the bottom; it just sounds better, more dramatic, to say "bottom shelf") at Five Video in Miami

Florida, Craig was reunited with this headbanging file. The name had been changed to Death Laid An Egg (maybe that was really the original title, who knows). But there it was! And I was there. I saw the whole thing: the reuniting of a man and a movie. And it was an unforgettable experience.

Well, now Craig has returned to his home. With the movie. A happy man.

And, in answer to your other question: Yes, we also found IGNARA With A Touch Of Fire, a bunch of Franco films. Plus about a hundred other titles. What an adventure. Right?

Oh, I didn't review the movie, did I? Gee.....

I promise not to pine and moan about how talented my next reviewer is, but it ought to be against the law. Steve Bissette is indeed a wonder. Steve actually saw this file ON TV, SO MUCH for my opening comments. And it definitely left an impression (even in a mutilated form). I appreciate Steve (and my next reviewer) taking time out of their busy schedule to pen this

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Ah, a healthy serving of Chicken Gialli!

Seriously, here is a decidedly eccentric, typically convoluted and amoral Euro oddity: DEATH LAID AN EGG is all style, disjointed and oddly alluring. Until the film's finale, I was unsure whether Quastl and co-writer Franco Arcalli intended the film to be a black comedic parody of the self-indulgent 1960's New Wave cinema (particularly Godard, with the reflexive use of panning and editing, which is caricatured in the first few minutes of this file), or a deadpan but definitely wry entry in the same movement. Once the filmmakers finally tip their hand in the last ten minutes, though, the film pulls together as a remarkable transition between the New Wave (emphasis on Godard and Antonioni's BLOW UP, 1966) and the gialli proper. Until then, it is almost impossible to get a handle on the absurdist, disorienting narrative, which unfolds in a deliberately fractured rhythm (reinforced by Bruno Madara's abrasive score) that makes Boog & Cammell's PERFORMANCE (made three years later) seem positively cozy by comparison.

Quastl and Arcalli, like Sava before (with THE EVIL EYE) and Argento after (his entire oeuvre), build their tale on the gialli tradition of a character's mistaken perception: a seminal element that also informs BLOW UP. In the opening moments, a poultry farm executive, Marco (Jean-Luc Trintignant), is seen apparently torturing and killing a prostitute in his reserved suite in a modern high-rise hotel room. Unknown to Marco, he is being spied upon by an up-and-coming corporate ad man. Like the ad man, we also believe Marco has actually killed the woman, and later see him 'kill' another in an equally bloody sequence.

In an almost peripheral manner, the film chronicles a plot against Marco by the ad exec and his secret mistress, who is the cousin (and ambiguous partner) to Marco's wife Anna (Gina Lollobrigida). It ultimately backfires on them in the sardonically offhand final twist.

This slight-of-hand works because our focus (as best we can maintain) remains on Marco, who fails in a clumsy attempt to kill Anna during a

photo session in the sterile, high-tech poultry farm and research laboratory that provides the film's bizarre environment. Marco destroys the photo that reveals his role in the 'accident', and no one is the wiser. Later, when Marco's dog takes an accidental one-way dive into the factory's chicken-grinding machinery, Marco is inspired to give killing Anne one more try. As he works to implement his plan, the conniving ad exec and mistress set their's into motion as well ('It'll all be ours, the house, the poultry farm, and I'm finished being the poor cousin whose relatives couldn't manage to sleep alone!', she rhapsodized), with the final plot convolutions being closer to Umberto Lenzi's deviantly domestic DIAMOLIQUE-inspired Carroll Baker gialli than Argento's more visionary fare.

The ad man really kills a woman in Marco's reserved suite and calls the police, setting Marco up for arrest. Marco, however, cleans up the suite and heads for the factory to dispose of the body in the grinder...Marco may be a closet sadist, but his previous 'murders' were pre-arranged, faked affairs staged as recreational releases of his pent-up compulsions! Unfortunately, Marco's trap for Anne sends him plunging into the grinder, leaving the murdered woman's body to be discovered by the ad exec and cousin, who are promptly found by the police as they try to dispose of it. Quesi dwells on a parting shot of an egg-cooking cop before the end title.

Sounds linear enough in the retelling, but rest assured that there is nothing straightforward about DEATH LAID AN EGG. The opening titles are laid over microphotography of fetal chick organs and body parts, throbbing and flowing with life: biomorphic imagery that suggest Cronenberg (and recalls the titles to De Palma's SISTERS) rather than gialli. Only one sequence in the film fulfills the queasy potential of these images, unveiling a brood of headless, wingless, tiny-boned chickens who grow quickly without ingesting food, the results of a spilled experimental mutagen: overcome with revulsion, Marco gorily beats them to a pulp, despite the economic possibilities they may represent in the mass-production of poultry products.

Given this element, and the ever-dominant mise en scene of the chicken factory itself, it is surprising that the implicit biological horror is only a minor thread in Quesi's very strange tapestry. Absurdist chicken shit is juxtaposed with weird science, sex, murder, industrial espionage, and high fashion: as I said earlier, style is everything in this film. Even the dialogue reflects this ('lingerie is important, too; your bra and panties are almost as important as what's under them!'; 'The work, the egg, it's impossible to stop it!'), with passages edging into the truly hallucinogenic (an early dream/vision ends with stuttering frames of faraway trees receding into the night in a distinctively LSD-tinged moment).

Quesi left his mark on the spaghetti western cycle with a single film, the brutal DIAMMO, KILL!, and this meandering, ekimbo pseudo-giallo might be the closest the old maestro came to doing a horror film. Though it is not nearly as horrific or grisly as DIAMMO, KILL!, DEATH LAID AN EGG does carry the same surreal, anything-goes atmosphere that keeps the viewer perpetually off-guard.

All in all, a memorably weird movie, and I can see why Craig has a soft spot in his skull for it. I'm similarly haunted by a British curio from this same period, WOMEN...IS A FOUR-LETTER WORD, wherein David Warner grows giant hallucinogenic mushrooms in a steazy factory, which DEATH LAID AN EGG kept reminding me of for no good reason.

I'm most proud to have Tim Lucas contribute to this very special issue. In fact, Tim's responsible for there being a DEATH LAID AN EGG forum. We were talking one night and I was moaning about the fact that just one review of this film couldn't possibly do it justice. So, Tim suggested a forum and here we are. As usual with a Lucas review, Tim points out many things I never even caught while viewing this film. Finally, if any of my readers are holding off buying a subscription to Tim's Video Watchdog magazine, I URGE YOU TO SEND HIM your \$15 NOW!!! This worthwhile project will never get off the ground if you don't support it. Don't depend on the regular assholes who read Gorezone/Fangoria to do it for you. If it doesn't have Freddy or Jason on the cover, they'll not part with daddy's money. Send it to Tim Lucas, P.O. BOX 5283, CINCINNATI, OH 45203-0283. The fate of NYC is in your hands.

Too bad that photographs aren't like mirrors, "Gina Lollobrigida's Anna says in LA MORTE HA FATTO L'UOVO, at a point still early enough for screenwriters Giulio Quastri and Franco Arcalli to lace manifestoes through its weavings. "I mean," continues La Lollo, "a photograph can't be changed. In a mirror, you can fix your hair. In a photograph, it's too late." To which her niece Gabriella (Idea Giulio) responds, "You can tear them up if you want to."

In any other film, such dialogue would readily suggest a comment on the nature of cinema, the photograph that changes 24 times every minute, that is "torn up" every time one perspective adjusts to another. In the case of a film jointly credited to its director and editor, this spectra is more than present -- it's pregnant. At first vision, FLUCKED may appear to be a silly, overinflated gauffile of cinematic illusions, illusions and delusions. Chuckling under the weight of all its ghig and fancy frippery, however, is a savage, political satire of the European bed farces in which its stars (Gina Lollobrigida and Jean-Louis Trintignant) once made their names. The result is a film that prods and pokes the impulses behind that out-dated genre, laying bare the twisted sexual subtexts underlying their blithely bourgeois surfaces.

Beginning with portentous, microscopic images of the thriving, pulsing auroras at work within an eggshell, FLUCKED unfolds into a disorientating assault of visual non-sequiturs -- glimpses of the afternoon activities in the rooms of an Italian hotel catering to illicit revels -- all too abstractedly presented to be called "scenes." To the choppy rhythms of Bruno Maderna's discordant, flamenco guitar, images of middle-class perversion are interspersed with rapid-fire cutaways to closeups of emotionless faces and diagonal tracking shots of the similarly unyielding facade of the hotel (which the manager later explains, "is bigger than it appears from the outside"), each element apparently bent on deflecting the very curiosity it tases. An old man in boxer shorts indulges in the solitary pleasure of admiring himself with a plastic bag over his head; a younger man in leather racing gloves instructs his prostitute in ritual play-acting; a voyeur savadrops on the couple next door, decides to spy on them through his balcony window, and witnesses -- a murder? What the viewer does not yet suspect (and won't until their second viewing of the picture) is that there is more to this violent episode "than it appears from the outside," that what we have seen is only a cinematic illusion created by witnessing a few moments "torn out" of a different context: A mirror held up to our own suspicious natures.

In the first of many ironies, Questi and Arcalli settle on the murderer -- Marco (Tristignant) -- for our hero. Marco's domestic life is not too far removed from those of the tormented anti-heroes portrayed in countless earlier and later gialli: he's married not only to money, but latent lesbian money. Marco's sexless marriage to Anna, the striking heiress of a lucrative chicken breeding business (which he runs for her), is made bearable only by the double-edged presence of Anna's niece Gabriella, a striking young blond whom both are bedding on the sly. Gaby won't run away with Marco. Knowing that he is penniless without her aunt -- the cliched "run away with me" scene is winkingly staged, Tex Avery-style, in a field of corn -- so Uncle Marco hatches a plot to arrange Anna's demise in the deadly rotorblades of their newly-autostated (hence, no witnesses) poultry processing plant. As an alibi, Marco buys Anna a set of round-trip tickets to Amsterdam (where, the travel agent claims, no one is going because of "the war they've got on").

Irony strikes again with the introduction of Marco's advertising director, Mondaini (Jean Sobieski), who turns out to be not only the voyeur who witnessed his stabbing of the prostitute in the hotel, but Gaby's true love, as well. With this trump blackmail card held in reserve, Mondaini and Gaby prepare to double-cross the couple and inherit the breeding plant for themselves. They do this by informing Anna of Marco's assignations by anonymous letter, which -- in the manner of Italian sex farces -- prompts her to pose as a prostitute to catch her husband in the act. In a scene unfolding offscreen, Mondaini murders Anna in Marco's reserved hotel room (Room 724), not realizing that Marco's afternoon "murders" are nothing more than harmless psychodramas enacted with prostitutes, trick knives and Hunt's catnip. In the meantime, Marco realizes that Gaby has been trying to implicate him in a rigged sabotage of the chicken plant; he decides not to kill Anna. He burns his alibi tickets to Amsterdam and, going to his hotel room to vent his frustrations, finds Anna's corpse. Notified by Mondaini's anonymous call, the police arrive at the hotel announcing that a woman's being killed in Room 724, to which a group of hookers laugh. "We've all be killed in Room 724!" Marco carries Anna back to the factory to dispose of her body, but carelessly falls victim to the same trap he laid for his wife, plummeting through the rotorblades into the granary. Gaby and Mondaini return to the factory, where the authorities find them at the side of Anna's body and take them into custody. (To quote my wife, who has a way with such sayings, "Sometimes even the best laid plans turn out to be a rotten egg.")

PLUCKED might well be subtitled "Scenes from the Class Struggle at INCIS DePaolis," thanks to its sardonic portrait of the executive and working classes. Anna & Marco's chicken breeding factory is a well-conceived point-of-view for all the film's seemingly loose tangents: Anna and Marco's symbolic control over, and victimization of the young is maintained, despite the ambitious culpability of its younger couple, by endless images of the mass-production and consumption of eggs; also, the fact that their factory has become automated designates Anna and Marco as enemies of society (their ex-employees still haunt the factory's gates, staring accusingly through the fence); furthermore, when the family dog accidentally falls victim to the rotorblades in the granary, we sense that the factory has finally succeeded in robbing Anna and Marco's marriage of its last personal element.

One of the secret briefs at the core (the yolk?) of PLUCKED, I believe, was to portray how the confusion of ourselves with our jobs



can result in emotional displacement and, whether to innocent or dangerous extremes, aberrant behavior. Marco's confusion is to identify with the chickens Anna's family has processed for generations, an obsession which resonates as he rooms in a modern hotel of steel and glass resembling the stacked cages in her automated henhouse and, therein, translates purchased women into meat puppets who can be likewise processed into fryer parts, thighs and breasts. In the movie's most oft-quoted detail, Marco is at one point confronted with Anna's laboratory's development of a mutant species of headless and wingless chicken. He can't help but lash out and destroy the creatures because they "offend his standards"; they symbolize for him a further castration of an already reduced self-image. His slaughter of their defenseless bodies is accompanied by the hysterical squeakings of hundreds of caged whole chickens, so outcry which somehow politicizes the atrocity by relating it, subliminally, to the men without futures who continue to gather outside and stare accusingly at the factory that no longer employs them. By killing this "offense," we sense that Marco is not only disturbed by the collective J'accuse outside, which he pretends to ignore, he identifies with it. His estrangement from Anna has its basis not in their real place of intercourse: the unmanned factory itself.

Marco's diminished self-image is mysteriously

confirmed by Mondaini's advertising campaign for "The Association" -- an appropriately dehumanized title for a chicken breeding collective bent on nothing short of world domination -- namely, "to conceptualize the Chicken as the principle actor in the drama of modern life." Quasiti and Arcelli cut away from Mondaini's storyboard of a playboy chicken in tuxedo to a scene at a party, where Marco (and a hundred men like him) are similarly attired. In a telling detail, Mondaini initiates a silly game of confessions for the bourgeois by emptying a room of all its furniture -- reducing it to a hollowed area with shell-white walls -- and locking one couple inside at a time, forcing them to communicate. We are offered only a couple of glimpses behind that locked door, which present us with redundant variations of a sexual moaning, an anonymous man's hands squeezing the oval glands under an appropriately white-and-yellow dress.

If Marco is the perfect chicken, Gabriella is suggested as the perfect woman for him in another of Anne's soliloquies. "I was noticing Gabriella today," she reminisces to her husband while stripping for bed. "Her body seems to be made from different parts, beautifully united, but still each one perfected to be separated and put together again... It wouldn't be to destroy her, but to remake her, a new way every time." The scene is one of the film's most telling, because it reveals that Anne -- fantasizing less about the girl than about her total control over her -- shares Marco's emotional displacement, while the fractured images accompanying her words (admittedly cropped on video from a Techniscope original) confirm the film's bizarre, choppy visual technique as a deliberate reflection of its broken, perverted, reoriented minds.

Gina Lollobrigida -- who made her debut in Riccardo Freda's THE BLACK EAGLE (AQUILA NERA, 1946) and whose famous public image was developed by none other than Mario Bava over the courses of several opus films for director Mario Coates -- lends wonderful presence to Anne and it's interesting to see her dipping her own toes in the genre her mentors drifted into. In fact, if shorn of its irrational narrative techniques, PLUCKED would nakedly resemble Jerzy Skolimowski's KING, QUEEN, KNAVE (1971, based on the novel by Vladimir Nabokov), another ironic portrait of triangular lust and murder in which the actress starred. According to Maurizio Ponsi's The Films of Gina Lollobrigida (Citadel Press, \$14.95 -- and well worth it), "La Lollo" worked for most of her career with a contract guaranteeing her the right to dub her own performances for international releases. She waived her dubbing rights on this picture, which indicates that she either didn't take the project seriously, or that she felt the sting of its satire only too well.

In the end, this isn't a movie about headless, wingless chickens or actresses whose careers could be equated with an outlay of white breast meat. It's an intellectual's sex farce, not sexy exactly, but gender-headed: male in its very refusal to reveal its thoughts, female in its demands to be courted. In the final analysis, I suppose this movie doesn't quite meet the requirements to become one of my personal obsessions, but mind you, I didn't discover it

accidentally, the way lasting love stories tend to begin. I didn't glimpse it once and wait two decades for my moonstruck glance to be returned. Rather, FLOCKED arrived at my house one day like a mail-order bride, the deadline for this issue looming over our courtship like a shotgun at a wedding. I like this movie's company well enough; it's weird, it's fun, it's intelligent -- it's just that there's a tad too much method in its madness for my taste. There is a machine in its ghost.

Whether Quastl and Arcalli were successful with their filmic experiment is perhaps unanswerable in any definitive sense and probably a moot point. The more important declaration is that their film has lost little of its exotic freshness, and none of its challenge, in 23 years. As the wretched, jailbound Mondaini exclaims at the height of his low-bred ambition, "It's now! Frapontaneously now! Never then tomorrow!"

What this says about our modern world and collective state of mind I would be afraid to say.

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Finally, let me thank the following people for making this issue as special as it is. THANK YOU: Tim Lucas, for the pictures from the book on Gina Lollobrigida, Mike Ferguson, for the plot synopsis from the Monthly Film Bulletin and also for the pictures from the Unitalia Yearbook, Max Della Mora, for the many different logos that I've been using over the past few issues.

Coming up in future issues are reviews by John Martin (Rashais), David Karkas (Shock X-Press), Tim Lucas (Video Watchdog), and many others.

